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# Cconnections

## Working together to promote literacy

An extract of a book, *Literacy, libraries and learning: using books and online resources to promote reading, writing and research*, edited by Ray Doiron and Marlene Asselin and published by Pembroke, 2005.

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Literacy programs have traditionally relied on school libraries to supply books and reference materials for students' independent reading and for completion of research reports. Regardless of the approach to teaching literacy, classroom teachers sent children for library books and encouraged them to read. When a social studies or science unit required a research project, students often used an encyclopedia, several non-fiction trade books and some audiovisual resources to complete their projects. The teacher librarian primarily distributed and managed library resources and taught 'library skills', usually in isolation from the classroom program. We understood that the purpose of a school library was mainly to provide classroom programs.<.p>

Several factors have combined to change the relationship between school library and classroom-based literacy programs; they also raise our awareness that both programs play a role in children's literacy achievement.

First of all, resources have changed and broadened dramatically. A school library still maintains a solid collection of fiction and easy reading (picture) books, as well as a wide range of the latest information books. Information books, though, have changed in character. They have gone from the dull and dreary texts of bygone times to comprehensive, visual treasures that lure students into a wide variety of contemporary subjects. With innovations in digital technologies have come many new types of resources. These include web-based static sites and more interactive, virtual learning environments. All this has heightened the need for more expertise in selecting and accessing these resources; it has also called for instructional leadership on the part of the teacher librarian to integrate these resources into teaching and learning.

In addition to changes in school library resources, the nature of classroom literacy programs has changed. These have become structured around children's literature, both fiction and information books. Effective teaching of a literature-biased program relies on a greater and richer collection of resources than a single classroom could possibly have. When teachers want to give a direct instruction lesson on rhyming words, adjectives or one of myriad writing skills, they seek out strong examples from children's books that will connect their lessons to the reading students will do. This approach highlights the need for classroom teachers and teacher librarians to communicate more as they try to connect resources to instruction.

Teachers also seek to reflect our multicultural world in their literacy programs. They search for representative materials that create richness and diversity in their instructional programs. This task can be daunting, though, as they try to be as inclusive as possible and to address many concerns and issues. Supporting a school library allows a school to build a larger and more diverse collection of resources

that represent all people in the local and world communities. The library becomes a dynamic resource shared equally by all teachers.

Another factor in strengthening the relationship between teacher librarians and classroom teachers is the growing and pervasive influence of information and communication technologies (ICT). School libraries have traditionally been home to many 'information technologies' such as filmstrips, videos and sound recordings, but the Internet has eliminated most of those resources. Instead, it has made online digital resources and online learning environments key components in most standards-based curriculum frameworks. Classroom teachers are now expected to integrate ICTs into teaching and learning. They need the help of a specialist, like the teacher librarian, to meet these growing expectations.

The Internet has also raised all sorts of questions about selecting appropriate digital resources and providing all students with equitable access to resources. This heightens the importance of teaching critical literacy. With their expertise in ICTs and knowledge of the skills and strategies associated with finding and using information, teacher librarians stand as essential players and effective partners in developing any school curriculum.

With such a vast array of exciting and innovative resources at their disposal, classroom teachers and teacher librarians have all the tools to provide effective literacy instruction and improve student achievement. Effective teaching is not enough, however. Many forces compete for children's attention and interests, so teachers and teacher librarians have become champions for literacy, promoting and encouraging reading in every aspect of their work. Teachers and teacher librarians have always been avid readers and promoters of reading for their students. In today's highly technological world, though, it is essential that we combine our efforts and make reading – and literacy in general – the number one priority for our schools.

We have all heard teachers complain that students do not read enough or that some just do not enjoy it. We can no longer dismiss such comments, if we ever could. Instead, if we find that students do not like to read, an alarm bell should sound in our ears. The news should goad us to action. All of the time, we need to use all the ways we possibly can to motivate students to read, to help them develop the reading habit, and to provide them with time and resources for reading to happen at school. We need to model the power that reading has in our lives and to show students that we read too; in other words, to persuade them that they need to make reading a priority in their lives.

This extract is taken from the introduction to the book *Literacy, libraries and learning: using books and online resources to promote reading, writing and research*, edited by Ray Doiron and Marlene Asselin.

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